UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

Department of Public Information • Central News Section • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/1970
1 September 1995

FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Secretary-General cancels trip to Beijing for medical reasons; Fourth World Conference on Women opens Monday.

* NATO pauses air operations over Bosnia; United Nations and Bosnian Serbs enter negotiations.

* Secretary-General says Bosnian Serbs violated international humanitarian law in Srebrenica.

* High Commissioner for Refugees arrives in East Africa for meetings in Burundi, Tanzania, Zaire and Rwanda.

* French UN civilian police monitor in Haiti shot by unidentified gunman.

* Ambassador of Guyana appeals for increased international assistance to deal with gold mine disaster.

* Subcommission on Minorities ends session in Geneva.

* Six-member Council of State of Liberia is sworn in.

* Speakers at NGO Meeting on Palestine call on Israel to comply with 1993 Declaration of Principles.

* * *

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has cancelled his trip to Beijing, the Republic of Korea, and Japan for medical reasons. According to his Spokesman, the decision was taken on the strongest possible advice by doctors that he not undertake a trip of this length and nature at this time. He is suffering from the flu and a high fever. The Secretary-General expressed regret at the development; he placed the greatest importance on the Women's Conference and had worked a great deal to ensure its success.

In China, tens of thousands of people have gathered in and around Beijing for the Fourth World Conference on Women and the parallel NGO Forum.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

The Forum, which began on 30 August and runs to 8 September, is located in Huairou outside of Beijing.

Under-Secretary-General Ismat Kittani will open the official Conference Monday by reading the Secretary-General's statement at 3 p.m. local time. A welcoming ceremony takes place that morning in the Great Hall of the People in the centre of Beijing.

Participants will hold a general exchange of views in plenary session from 4 to 13 September. Parallel to the plenary, a Main Committee will negotiate the draft platform for action, which will then be considered by the plenary on 14 and 15 September, the final days of the Conference.

One of the major challenges before the Fourth World Conference on Women is how to accelerate application of the 1985 Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. The draft platform for action, the exact wording of which remains to be agreed upon, aims to establish a basic group of priority actions to be carried out over the next five years. It identifies strategic objectives and actions in 12 critical areas of concern, which relate generally to poverty, education, health, violence, armed conflict, economic structures, power sharing and decision-making, mechanisms to promote the advancement of women; human rights, the media, the environment, and the girl child.

The Fourth World Conference on Women is part of a continuum of international conferences held under United Nations auspices during the current decade to address interrelated problems of economic and social development, human rights and other matters.

* * *

NATO has paused air operations over Bosnia to assess attacks to date, and talks that were underway between the United Nations and the Bosnian Serbs. According to a United Nations Spokesman, the pause was not a suspension of the NATO operation, which would only be suspended when there was full agreement by Bosnian Serbs with United Nations conditions.

UNPF Force Commander Bernard Janvier met today with Bosnian Serb Army General Ratko Mladic to discuss the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the 20-kilometre exclusion zone around Sarajevo, the cessation of all attacks and threats of attacks on United Nations safe areas, and an immediate cessation of hostilities.

Thursday night, targets around Gorazde and Mostar were attacked by NATO aircraft, the Spokesman said. The Rapid Reaction Force continued to target Bosnian Serb positions around Sarajevo. The aim of the operation remained the same -- to remove the threat to the people of Sarajevo. More than 500 sorties had been flown since Wednesday.

(more)

The United Nations had received some reports that Bosnian Serbs were moving some heavy weapons from the exclusion zone. While this was a positive development, it did not constitute an elimination of the threat to Sarajevo; far more was needed. The United Nations estimated that prior to the NATO operation, there were up to 300 Bosnian Serb heavy weapons within the exclusion zone.

* * *

There is significant evidence that Bosnian Serb forces committed substantial violations of international humanitarian law and human rights following the fall of Srebrenica on 11 July, including summary executions. That is the assessment of the Secretary-General in a report to the Security Council dated 30 August, in which he says an in-depth investigation must take place before more detailed and extensive conclusions can be drawn.

Despite repeated requests, Bosnian Serb authorities have refused access to persons who have been displaced from Srebrenica and Zepa. The Secretary-General said the Security Council may wish to reiterate its urgent call to the Bosnian Serb leadership to authorize immediate and full access to the displaced. Such access should include the possibility of an impartial international investigation. Access should also be granted to the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit and register any persons detained against their will.

* * *

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata has arrived in East Africa on her mission, which was requested by the Secretary-General, to facilitate the voluntary return of refugees from Zaire.

According to a United Nations Spokesman, Mrs. Ogata was in Burundi on Friday having a number of internal meetings, primarily with United Nations personnel; she also went to the Zaire border where she saw some 100 volunteer returnees cross the border. On Saturday, she was scheduled to meet with high-level Government officials in Burundi, as well as Tanzanian officials in Arusha. On Monday, Mrs. Ogata was to travel to Rwanda to meet with senior government officials. Tuesday, she was expected to be in the Goma and Bukavu camps and Wednesday should would tentatively meet with senior Zairian officials.

* * *

A French civilian police monitor of the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH) was shot by an unidentified gunman this morning outside of his home southwest of Port au Prince. According to a United Nations Spokesman, he was medically evacuated to Miami, where he was reported to be in critical condition with three bullet wounds and was undergoing surgery.

The Frenchman was the first member of the UN mission to be shot since the United Nations took over on 31 March from the multinational force. An investigation of the incident was underway.

* * *

The Permanent Representative of Guyana to the United Nations today appealed for increased international assistance to help mitigate the effects of the recent gold mine disaster, which had polluted two rivers with cyanide.

Speaking to the press, Ambassador Samuel Insanally said the situation was now under some control. Recent analyses showed that there had been some reduction of contamination. The Government had sent scientists into the area; the company itself had dispatched a team of experts and samples were being taken constantly.

He said the gold mine, a multinational company owned mainly by Canadians and Americans, was the largest in Latin America. Fortunately, there were no reported fatalities but all aquatic life was thought to be dead in the Omai River.

The Government had established a disaster control team, and a commission of inquiry to find out what went wrong. The mine was closed until it was decided that operations could be safely resumed. The economic impact was quite serious, not only for the gold mine itself but also for the Guyanese fishing industry. Some countries in the region had halted imports; however, less than one percent of fish came from the spill area and exports were not contaminated, he said.

Given Guyana's high debt, Ambassador Insanally said it did not have the resources to counter the environmental disaster and needed international assistance to monitor on-going environmental effects. He said the United Nations Development Programme was actively engaged in helping the Government respond to the crisis.

For the long term, he said it was time to develop partnerships with transnational corporations, where all partners had a sense of responsibility. He voiced support for a code of conduct for transnational corporations and said developed countries should assist small developing countries with issues related to environmental and development.

* * *

The forty-seventh session of the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities has concluded in Geneva. During four-weeks of meetings, the Subcommission adopted more than 50 resolutions and decisions, two Chairman's statements and a joint statement with the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

(more)

The Subcommission condemned continued human rights violations in Iraq, Iran, Rwanda, former Yugoslavia, and Kosovo. It passed two measures on the Middle East, one supporting the peace process between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, and another calling for respect for human rights in the Israeli occupied Arab territories and compliance by the Palestinian authority with all current international norms in human rights.

The Subcommission recommended that one of its experts be appointed by the Commission on Human Rights to investigate cases of systematic rape during armed conflict, and that the Commission designate an expert to look into allegations of commercial trafficking in human organs and tissues. A joint statement with the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination called for mobilization of all efforts to eliminate racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, and for the speedy establishment of a permanent international criminal court to prosecute perpetrators of massive violations of human rights.

A statement by the Chairman condemned hostage-taking and the murder of hostages, mentioning, among other particulars, the recent murder of a Norwegian hostage by terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir. The Subcommission also adopted a resolution on prevention of incitement to hatred and genocide, particularly by the media, noting the role played by a radio station operating from Zaire in inciting racial hatred among Burundi's citizens. The measure condemned "the role increasingly played by some print or audiovisual media in inciting genocidal hatred".

In closing statements, Jose Ayala Lasso, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, called upon States to pay more attention to human rights and to support the efforts of the United Nations. Subcommission Chairman Ioan Maxim (Romania) said serious violations of human rights continued every day, endangering the lives of millions; to better approach current challenges, the Subcommission should give more serious consideration to revising its work methods.

* * *

The six-member Council of State of Liberia was sworn in today, in accordance with last month's peace agreement, according to a United Nations Spokesman . The Council of State will be in power for one year while elections are organized.

The High Commissioner for Refugees says some 12,000 refugees have already returned to Liberia spontaneously within the last month. A UNHCR mission is going to Liberia to assess the requirements and will begin a programme for the voluntary return of up to 800,000 refugees.

* * *

(more)

Press Release DH/1970
1 September 1995

Speakers at the United Nations International NGO Meeting and European NGO Symposium in Vienna have called on Israel to meet its responsibilities in compliance with the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements signed with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993.

Hashem Mahameed, a member of the Israeli Knesset, said Israel was disregarding the Declaration's two fundamental tenets -- Israeli troop withdrawal and Palestinian sovereignty over territory. A number of speakers supported that view.

Speakers also blamed Jewish settlements, delays in the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Palestinian territories and detainment of Palestinian prisoners for the current stalemate in negotiations. The four-day meeting ends today.

* *** *